

March 6, 2007

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WASHINGTON, DC- U.S. Rep. Charlie Melancon and U.S. Sen. Mary Landrieu today sent Federal Emergency Management Agency Director R. David Paulison a letter requesting a meeting between interested parties to resolve an ongoing issue with debris removal contracts in St. Bernard Parish. Parish government officials have said the parish may have to file for bankruptcy if this problem is not favorably resolved. FEMA has not reimbursed the Parish for tens of millions of dollars for debris removal work, including essential sewage pumping and transport to a treatment plant, due to incomplete Project Worksheets. The contractor hired to remove sewage in the parish has said they will not be able to continue their essential work without compensation and St. Bernard Parish may soon be facing a public health crisis. In addition, St. Bernard Parish believes that FEMA grossly underestimated the costs for many projects in the parish and the parish now faces an additional \$30 million shortfall for demolition and debris work already completed.

"We understand statutory requirements and agency policy, but Hurricane Katrina and Rita recovery and rebuilding efforts have been greatly impeded by bureaucracy," Rep. Melancon and Sen. Landrieu state in the letter.

"However, we must address pressing needs, and the issues between FEMA, SBP [St. Bernard Parish], and [the contractor] are urgent. If [the contractor] is unable to continue its sewage pumping project, St. Bernard public officials tell us there will literally be sewage in the streets, thus causing a health hazard to the residents trying to return to St. Bernard."

St. Bernard Parish has requested two meetings with representatives from FEMA, the state, and other interested parties, and on both occasions FEMA has refused to attend, claiming either that they were not invited or that it is their policy to work directly with the state not local governments or contractors. In their letter to Director Paulison, Rep. Melancon and Sen. Landrieu ask that the FEMA head facilitate a meeting so that these urgent issues can finally be resolved before St. Bernard Parish is forced to consider filing for bankruptcy.

Rep. Melancon added today, **"This bureaucratic gridlock has already gone on for too long, and we need to resolve it as soon as possible so that the people of St. Bernard Parish aren't subjected to yet another crisis. I urge Director Paulison to act quickly in**

bringing all affected parties to the table so we can come up with a solution that will help, rather than impede, St. Bernard Parish's recovery from the catastrophic damage caused by Hurricane Katrina."

A copy of the letter can be found [here](#) .

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